

## What should you be doing?

### To prepare at home:

- Make it a habit to fill any prescriptions several days before you run out.
- Help elderly neighbors and neighbors with disabilities develop their emergency plans. In our state, people have managed through difficult times because neighbors helped neighbors.
- In a pandemic, many people could be very sick at the same time. Worksites, schools and day care centers may close. Think about how you will manage if everyday life is severely disrupted.
- Stay up to date on all your immunizations, especially on flu and pneumonia shots.

### Stay informed.

- Check the Department of Health Website [www.health.ri.gov](http://www.health.ri.gov)
- Listen to the news.
- Read newspapers.
- Ask for information from community leaders.
- Follow directions from health officials.

## What is the state doing?

Governor Donald L. Carcieri has appointed a Pandemic Flu Working Group to prepare Rhode Island for a pandemic influenza outbreak. State agencies, municipalities, hospitals, health care providers, businesses, industries and community leaders are working together to minimize the effect of an influenza pandemic on everyday life.

We are:

- Preparing to purchase antiviral medications and distribute vaccines if they are available.
- Helping health care facilities plan for a patient load much larger than normal with short staffing.
- Helping businesses prepare to keep their critical operations going.
- Planning to ensure that essential supplies to the state do not stop.

For updates, check [www.health.ri.gov](http://www.health.ri.gov)

**"Flu" is a short way to say influenza, a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. These viruses can cause mild to severe illness, depending on the strain of the virus and the individual's ability to fight it off.**

The State of Rhode Island, Donald L. Carcieri, Governor  
The RI Department of Health, David R. Gifford, MD, MPH, Director  
The RI Emergency Management Agency, Robert J. Warren, Executive Director

**Your Health  
in Rhode Island**

# Pandemic Influenza



Pandemic influenza is caused by a new influenza virus that appears or "emerges" in the human population. The new virus causes serious illness because humans have no existing immunity to it. It spreads easily from person to person, causing a global outbreak of disease within a very short time. There is no influenza pandemic now, but we need to be prepared.

# What you need to know: There is no pandemic influenza in the world today, but...

.... recent reports of a new influenza virus infection transmitted from birds to humans in Asia have drawn attention to the possibility that pandemic flu could arrive in the United States soon.

## ***Why worry about pandemic influenza?***

**The influenza virus, in a pandemic situation, will infect about 30% of the Rhode Island population within six to eight weeks. In a very severe pandemic, 2% to 3% of those infected might die.**

**Of those who become ill, about 50% will seek medical care.**

**The demand for health care services will increase during a pandemic influenza outbreak. At the same time, the number of health care workers will decrease due to illness.**

**Current technology used to make influenza vaccine may not be fast enough to make a vaccine against pandemic influenza.**

## **How Influenza Spreads**

Influenza viruses spread in tiny droplets caused by coughing and sneezing. They usually spread from person to person. Sometimes, however, people become infected by touching something that was recently contaminated with the virus and then touching their mouth or nose. Most adults may be able to infect others beginning one day before they show symptoms and up to five days after becoming sick.

## **Influenza Symptoms**

Fever of 101°F or more  
Headache  
Extreme tiredness  
Dry cough  
Sore throat  
Muscle aches  
Stomach symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting and diarrhea (more common in children than adults)  
A runny nose is not typical of the influenza virus.

## **How to Avoid Getting Influenza**

Practice good health habits, starting today!

- **Wash your hands** frequently with soap and water, or alcohol-based gels.
- **Avoid close contact with people who are sick.** Also, when you are sick, stay away from others to protect them from getting sick too.
- **Stay home when you are sick.**
- **Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.**
- **Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze.** Use a disposable tissue and throw it away at once. It may prevent those around you from getting sick.
- **Get a flu shot every year.**

### **Medication**

Although the federal government keeps a certain amount of medical supplies and antiviral drugs on hand, no country has enough antiviral drugs to protect all its citizens. Some antiviral drugs may be helpful in an influenza pandemic, and would be given to priority groups based on the guidance from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that is current at that time.